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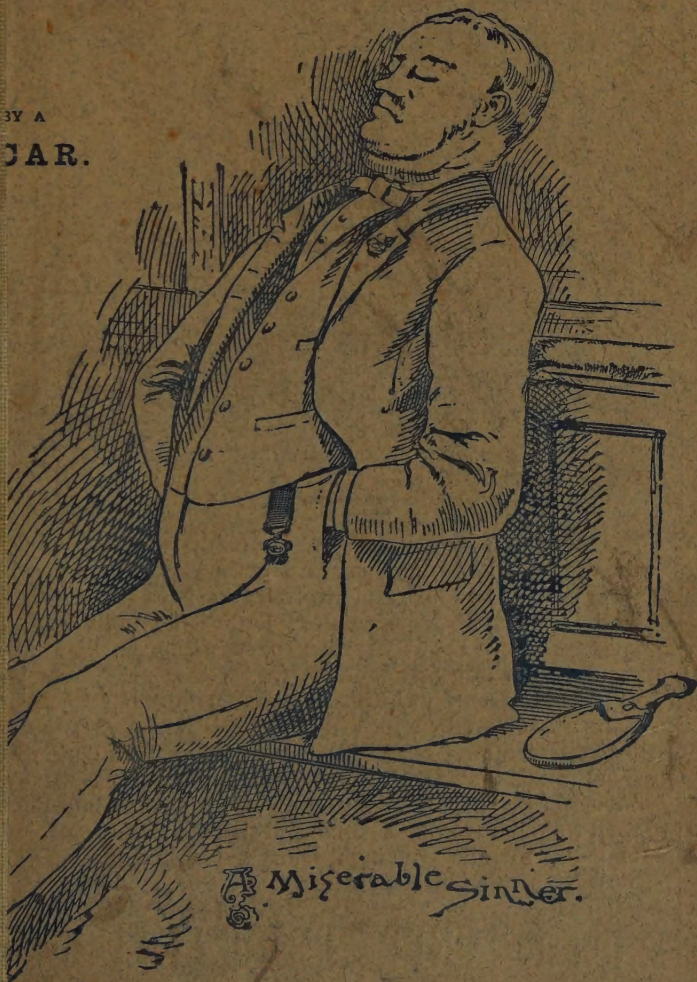
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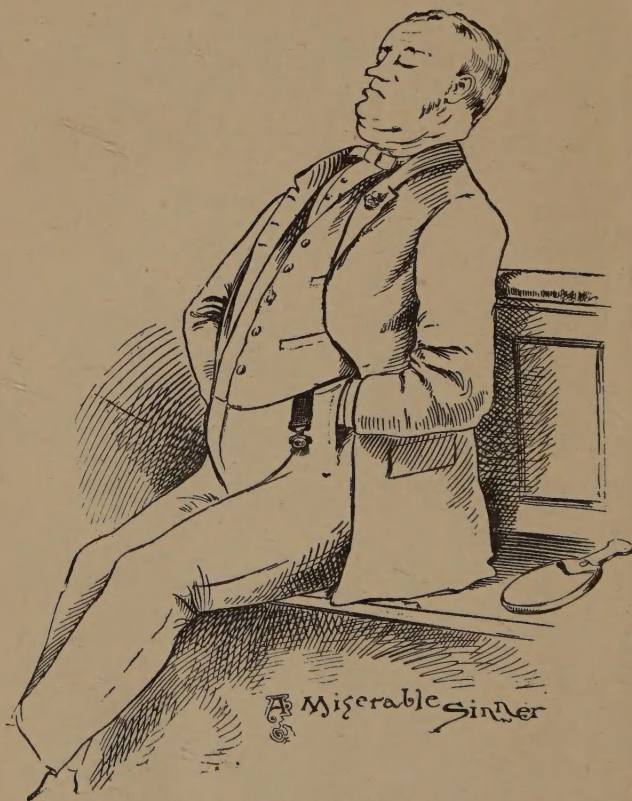
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IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE
OF THE
GROWING PRIDE WHICH WATCHED THE BIRTH
AND GRADUAL MATURITY
OF THIS BANTLING OF MINE—
THE ONLY VALUE IT POSSESSES IN MY OWN EYES—
I DEDICATE THESE MEMORIES,
WITHOUT PERMISSION ASKED OR OBTAINED,
TO EMILY, MY WIFE.

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My Churchwardens.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

IN an age of objective and subjective criticism like our own, it is, I suppose, meet that the Parson—and, by preference, the Country Parson—should incur that immoderate share of obloquy which has the supposed effect of hurling him into a profound obscurity in order that the average layman may stand fleckless in the sun.

I do not complain. Like the skinned eel, we get used to most things. Conscious of our own worth, we of “the cloth” are content to let the world rave of our intolerance, our want of tact, our feeble sermons, our papistical designs, our failure to grasp the proffered hand of the lay-helper, our inability to gauge the value of a suggestion, our assumption of the *rôle* of S. Simeon Stylites, our ignorance of the most elementary points of our profession; and can still contemplate, unmoved, the grotesque caricatures of

the typical Parson as pourtrayed in the pages of the average novel.

Consequently, if this, the "so-called" nineteenth century, as one of our Order has phrased it, claims us as convenient butts for the reception of as many cloth-yard shafts as it chooses to launch against us, I for one am willing to be shot at. Still, one would have thought that a certain gruesome picture, representing S. Sebastian in the character of a human porcupine, would have bidden our archers beware. After all, the Saint is stayed up by a Pillar.

Now the Parson has, of late, been having a rather bad time of it at the hands of a certain wag (or certain wags), who has (or have) given the world an opportunity of contemplating, first the Rector, and then the Curate, from a hitherto unrecognized point of view, yet none of our Order has set pen to paper by way of reply. The world has laughed, and bidden its dearest friend to purchase a copy, and so the merry tale goes round. But there are two sides to everything—even, as the child's riddle hath it, to a round plum-pudding; and I, who reverence an Englishman's love of fair play, am fain to pluck me down a certain favourite bow and wing an arrow in the direction of the Churchwarden. I am well equipped for the fray, for I have gathered in and about me a sufficient number of shafts to furnish a by no means contemptible armoury.

If I can only get them to fit the string, and the supple ash be not a trifle strained, I make no doubt that I shall wing home one here, one there, that shall tickle the British layman, and yet not harm him.

So that if, laying aside a passive attitude of some years' duration, I assume now one of defence, it is not for the lay critic to abuse me. I do but make use of the missiles he has discharged at me. All he can hope for is to find me a far more inferior marksman than himself, and so wait in patience until I have returned him his bolts. He will then be at liberty to anoint his scratches and punctures in preparation for a more vigorous onset, and to make so sure of his aim this time as to leave me lifeless upon the field—a perforated scarecrow for all future times to marvel at for an example of unparalleled audacity.

Yet, ere I die, I would leave it upon record that no man thinks more highly of the office of a Churchwarden, duly discharged, than I. It has been a rule of mine, for many years, to maintain publicly and privately—nay, in season and out of season—that the term “Church” is anything but synonymous with the term “Parson.” As there can be no Church without a Priest, so can there be no possible Church without a People. And when Priest and People realize that they are mutually working for a common end, towards which each must play the part assigned

to him to the utmost of his ability, there will be no more Rows Royal at our annual Vestry Meetings; the Church will flourish as she never flourished before, and the Church Association will put the shutters up and retire from business.

If it should chance that any of these pages should contribute in the slightest degree to so desirable a consummation, I shall cheerfully turn my chest once more to the arrow poised for my destruction, and bid him who casts it to speedily send it, and me, "home" together.

CHAPTER II.

THE TYPICAL WARDEN.

WHOSOEVER has been present in the flesh at one of those truly exhilarating functions called—not without reason—an Archidiaconal “Visitation,” must have been struck (but I hope not hurt) by the magnificent display of attendant laymen who form the pillars of their respective parishes.

Not a few of them are there for the first time, filled with a joyous wonder that their personal individuality should be an object of care to so great a dignitary. The older birds, taught by experience, have already paid their fees and secured their receipts. They will be well on their way homeward long before the others begin to find themselves the nucleus of a belated crowd. On the next occasion these too will have become men of experience, and will save the Archdeacon the trouble of audibly spelling over their respective patronymics by gently sibillating them into the Archidiaconal ear. Even the skilled Diocesan Secretary is not always equal to the emergency ;—Homerus himself is said to have

sometimes nodded—inasmuch as he occasionally causes universal consternation by suggesting to his superior a name to which no man present may lay an honest claim. However, for the nonce, such things as these must be endured; it is part of the ceremony of initiation. Let the newly-fledged Warden but abide in his office for twelve—nay, for ten—years, and the Archdeacon shall single him out from the throng, and reach him forth a friendly hand, and gaze into his face with kindly welcome; yea! breathe his name aright; and, perchance, enquire after the health of the Missis and the bairns.

But if you would espy the freshman-Warden in all the dignity of his newly-acquired position, you must seek him in his Parish Church on the following Sunday. From the time that he takes his preliminary canter from the vestry, onward to the moment when, according to the ancient Rubric, he collects the alms and other devotions of the people, he is well aware that the admiring gaze of the congregation is centred upon him. The parson may preach his best (or worst), but his hearers are impatient; they want to see the new Warden handing round the bag. The interest increases in intensity as he advances to present the results to the Parson. Probably, if one of his hands be disengaged, and there be no alms-dish, he will grasp the outstretched

palm of his Vicar in token of partnership ; otherwise, it will take two hands to present the offertory upon the "decent bason." The culminating point is reached thereafter. How will he back out ? Will he retire from the Vicarial presence as from Royalty ; or will he turn a rude back, and so depart ? Have we not watched this final scene, oh, my brothers, in the full knowledge that the issue thereof hath made or marred many a fledgling Warden ?

Not all at once, of course, can the details of such an office be fully realized. The time will yet be when Churchwardens shall be nominated six months before their Easter election, let us say at the beginning of Advent, the Church's New Year. The Archdeacon will then issue to all candidates a paper of instructions, containing certain specified subjects which they will be required to study. At Easter the candidates will be examined by the various Deans Rural, and a Report (with a big R) will be sent to the Archdeacon. This will secure the election of suitable men : at present, my own firm conviction is, that the new Warden's idea about the responsibility of his position exhausts itself in two points ; he must take round the bag, and he must show people into their seats. Only by slow degrees—more generally not at all—does he begin to understand that he should aim to become the confidential adviser of the Parson and the cherished representative of the People ; that he

must be skilled in the management of parochial finance; that the cares and interests of the Sunday and Day Schools are to be shared by him; that it is he who must make due provision for the carrying on of the Services; that he is the legal trustee of the goods of the Church; that he is responsible for the necessary repairs of the building, as well as for the neatness and order of the Churchyard; and that his personal example in the matter of attendance at public worship, most particularly at the Holy Communion, is superior in its influence to any sermon, however eloquent, that may be delivered from the pulpit before him. You shall see, my reader, that all this will be materially altered when I become an Archdeacon.

There are many aspects in which it is possible to contemplate the typical Warden. There is, for instance, the Warden Bounceable. Such an one moves in memory before me as I write. He was a good fellow, but he was afflicted with that peculiar form of moral disease which causes the sufferer to regard himself as omniscient.

He knew far more about my profession than I did, and was never tired of telling me what I "hot to do" or "hot not to do." After some months of this infliction, I thought it best to ruffle a feather or two. He informed me one Sunday evening, after I had made a special appeal with regard to attendance

at the Holy Communion, that such sermons as mine were not calculated to "draw money." I humbly assented. Said he, "We don't want so much of this 'ere doctorin': what you hot to do is to cheer 'em up a bit and not go a-leatherin' away at 'em. If I was in your place, an' drawin' four pound a week, I should go round an' 'ave tea with 'em now an' then, an' make meself a tome; the money'd come in fast enough then."

I made no attempt to traverse this ideal of a Clergyman's duty; but I said, "Mr. Bounceable, if I were to walk into your office to-morrow and say, 'Look here, my good fellow, you don't know how to manage this business, you ought to clear the whole thing out and begin on a new principle;' what would you say?" "Say," he replied, "nothin'; I should show you the door." "Quite so," I retorted, "and (pointing to it) there is my Vestry door; what do you think of the pattern of it?" I heard afterwards that he considered me to be a man who was "too big for his boots." I have tried to get at the kernel of this parable that I might realize its dark import; but, for me, it lies in a fathomless abyss.

There is, again, the Warden Officious—the man who is always in evidence (*aliter* always in the way). Small men, with a disposition to corpulent rotundity, contribute many such species. It is he who is gifted

with the power of marching up and down the central aisle before the Services—very much in the same way as the *dii majorum gentium* maintain order in a public School prior to the arrival of the Masters. His mission is to keep, not only the Parson, but the People in the particular sphere to which Providence has called them, and to see that they do not go beyond it. He is endowed with a peculiar aptitude for finding seats for people, always with a due regard to the positions they occupy in Society. He is a great friend of mine, and I once read to him what S. James says about the man with the gold ring, and the poor man in vile raiment ; but I think his general impression about the passage was that the writer of it would not have made a good Churchwarden.

Yet he had his good points. He never failed to see that a glass of port wine was ready for the Vicar—I was a Curate, unhappily, then—when he came into the vestry before the sermon to exchange the surplice of Christendom for the gown of Geneva. And woe betide the unlucky urchin who dared to cough or giggle during the discourse! Our friend would arise in the plenitude of wrath, waltz down the central aisle, pluck the offender by the ear, and hale him forth into the outer air. What happened after that, I know not ; but I believe it was bad for the boy.

One experience of him abides with me yet. We were one day talking over matters affecting the Church, and he had vigorously maintained the value of sermons in their effect upon human life. "For instance," he said, "you preached a sermon three weeks ago that I shall never forget; made me think about things, you know, and did me a lot of good." I was but young, and I confess that I was flattered. But I had forgotten, for a moment, the subject-matter of that jewel of a sermon. So I asked him, "What was it about?" "Why," said he, "you remember; about—er, what was it now? h'm; let's see; why—about—er, acting up to things, you know, and . . . er . . . eh?" "Yes," I said, "I seem to remember a sermon with that kind of thing in it; but what was the text?" "Oh, the text," he replied, "it was out of—curious that I can't just recall it—out of one of the Epistles, I think; or was it—my dear! what was Mr. ——'s text that we all admired so much? eh?" I looked that sermon up when I reached home. "My friend," said I, "if this be all the influence you possess, the sooner you 'act up' to your own true self the better; to the *emendaturis ignibus* you go; and I burnt it. Yet there is a moral in the story, and it is this, '*non bene conveniunt majestas et amor.*'"

There is, again, the Warden of the Exchequer, the man who holds the purse—and sticks to it. Great

is the power of the purse! What Parson so recalcitrant as not to acknowledge its supremacy? Infinite in potentiality is the Warden who manipulates the weekly totals of pence and threepenny-bits—I mean, he thinks so. I once heard a newly-elected Warden announce, at the vestry meeting, that he should decline to pay for anything that was not ordered over his sign manual. This was intended as a dig at the Parson, who was, fortunately, equal to the occasion. He said that, in that case, he would give notice on the following Sunday that the offertory would be devoted to the purchase of a new box of pens for use in the Vestry; that Warden's theory being that nothing intended for Vestry use should be charged to the Church accounts. It was the same Warden who made it his custom to appraise the congregations, at each service, from an advantageous point of espial—just as the manager of a theatre will reckon up the audience from the eye-hole in his drop-scene. "It'll be a poor do to-night," I once heard him say; "I don't think there's thirty shillings in the place!"

I have known these three characteristics of the typical Warden to exist—in some degree, at least—under one personality; but not often. And I have a word to say, as I close this chapter, if I may, haply, suggest a remedy for a state of things that ought not to exist.

In these days of blessed activity the Church has

her Retreats or Quiet Days for Clergy, for Sisters, for Guilds, for Schoolmasters and Schoolmistresses, for all sorts and conditions of men—save one. Has anybody ever heard of a Retreat or a Quiet Day for Churchwardens? There will be both in *my* Arch-deaconry, and I very much question if we are at liberty to complain of the ignorance and crassness of the average Warden when we consider how little regard is shown for the intellectual culture of what ought to be a most influential body of men. It is true that they blunder oftentimes; so do we. It is true that they are captious critics now and again; whose fault is that? I agree that a Warden, under favourable circumstances, can turn a Parish into hotch-potch, and its Parson into a madhouse; why? I admit that a Churchwarden who has control of the finances may sometimes incur the clerical charge of being a skinflint; has anyone shewn him a reason for being otherwise?

Truly I ought, if the terms of my introductory chapter are to hold good, to sit down hard upon the typical Warden; but I said I revered fair play, and I am not so sure that Parsons themselves have come to the full knowledge of what a Churchwarden might be.

People say, "As the Parson, so the People;" I doubt it. I would reverse the proverb, and say, "As the People, so the Parson." The average life

of a Clergyman, specially in our crowded towns, is one of desperate isolation. What would thousands of them give if they could find a congenial soul into whose sympathetic ear they could pour their multitudinous troubles, and from whom they might claim that friendly advice which would send them back to their work with redoubled energy? Would there be one tithe of the petty squabbles that disgrace our Vestry meetings if this were so? Should we not have solved a preliminary point in the riddle, "How is the Church to reach the masses?" And may I humbly suggest that some such system as I shall describe, in the chapter upon "Our Parish Council," might prove the beginning of a more extended organization without the loss of dignity or caste to either Priest or People?

CHAPTER III.

A VESTRY MEETING (TOWN).

FEW people would imagine that it is possible to extract a good deal of fun out of a Vestry Meeting, but it is so. The man who knows how to patiently watch and listen will be rewarded by a many-sided view of human nature not often to be equalled in the outside world. In the first place, a Vestry Meeting forms a very respectable kind of parochial barometer. As thus—

If the attendance of parishioners be sparse, you may safely fix the dial at “set fair.” Conversely, if the room be swiftly filled by a gathering throng—especially if the throng have a smile on its face, and meet in little knots or groups—the barometer will steadily decline until it registers “stormy.”

In the former case, the accounts will be practically taken as read, the Wardens will be elected as a matter of course, and twenty minutes will see the business finished. In the latter case, you will make the happy acquaintance of the man who wants to know—in fact, you will meet several of him. It is

he who extends the digits of his left hand, and who taps the tips thereof with a fat forefinger, as he challenges you to defend or to explain away the various points he desires to criticize. A ruthless man, this, for argument and explanation are equally thrown away upon him. He is attended, as a rule, by certain satellites whose duty it is to shout "Order!" if your explanation be in any degree personal, and "Question!" if things are getting too warm for your antagonist. There is a great deal of fun to be got out of the man who wants to know.

There is also a modicum of wit to be found in the man who persists in attending the Vestry Meeting, although he is neither a parochial ratepayer nor a resident parishioner. His qualification usually consists in his having attended the Church for the four or five Sundays prior to Easter. What can you do with such a man? You cannot turn him out; you cannot ignore him. If you object to his vote, the satellites murmur "Shame!" and you will probably be told that he "puts as much as a shilling a time" into the offertory.

The offertory, again, is quite Protean in the various changes it will undergo in the course of a single evening. You shall find that, if any item in the accounts is there to its own great shame, the offertory really belongs to the Parson; if, on the other hand, the People love to have it so, it will be found to belong

to the many-headed. I have known a blustering battle to centre round an item of fourpence-halfpenny. It was a ridiculous sum, of course ; never, I think, was so stalwart a battle fought in so trivial a cause ; and at one time it might have been reasonably predicted that a suitable epitaph for that meeting might be found in the words, " Its end was pieces."

Nor is the fun by any means restricted to one side. From the popular point of view there are few more blissful spectacles than the abject bewilderment of a nervous chairman. The various and knotty points of order upon which his opinion is humbly sought ; the difficulty of naming the gentleman in possession when four or five men are on their feet at the same time ; the moving of the " previous question "—how many Parsons are prepared to explain to a meeting what the previous question is ; and that, to make it effective, the man who moves it must vote against his own motion ?—all this is simply the tuning up of the parochial orchestra before the pantomime, and the actors know well the various parts for which they are cast.

The actual comedy begins by the moving of an amendment to any given resolution. It is succeeded by further amendments, more or less ridiculous. The action proceeds by a graduated series of amendments to amendments. The *dénouement* is reached when the chairman rises to take votes on the conglomerated

series of motions and counter-motions of which he has made copious notes.

I shall not attempt to follow him further in his course ; but the end of it will be something similar to the experience of a juvenile Parson who, being called upon to address a congregation of sailors, chose for his illustration the similitude of a ship in distress. His discourse was eagerly followed by the attendant navy with increasing interest, as he proceeded to jumble together spars, sails, rigging, trucks, and I know not what. "And now," triumphantly exclaimed the youthful Divine, "what would you do, tell me, in such a case as this!" Unfortunately, he had been led astray by the kindly interest which had beamed upon him. "Put yer hellum down, you lubber, an' run her ashore!" shouted one old salt, "it's the only thing you can do now."

A Town Vestry Meeting differs from its Country cousin in many material points, as you shall presently see ; chiefly because in a town there are many men with many minds ; in the sweet country you are dealing simply with the agriculturist. In the former, as I have already said, you get the man who *wants* to know—the personified interrogation ; in the latter you get the man who *knows*—the period, or full stop, beyond which no man may rashly venture. For the moment we are townsfolk ; let us attend our annual Vestry Meeting.

Mark the attitude of the senior Warden as he rises to place before us an account of his twelve months' stewardship. No Chancellor of the Exchequer, rising in the crowded House to elucidate the mysteries of the yearly Budget, knows half the pride of place and power that lurks in the swelling heart of the financial Warden. Only, there is this great distinction between the two; the Chancellor asks permission to spend, the Churchwarden tells you *how* he has spent. His balance-sheet may be discussed, but there is no help for it; the money is gone. Let a parishioner be never so critical, and the Warden can flatten him out straightway by hurling a voucher at him.

But let us watch. Carefully removing the seat he has occupied to a position immediately in the rear, the Warden of Finance assumes the perpendicular. With some deliberation—be still, proud heart, be still!—he arranges the *pince-nez* (one of the adjuncts or symbols of his office) and fixes them in position. With a careless sweep of the hand—as of one who is about to cut for partners—he spreads the pile of papers, and selects the preliminary abstract. And then—then comes the moment for the detective camera. If one could only, *now*, pull the little string or press the little button, there would be stereotyped the vision of a grave and dignified man of middle age; his left hand holding a paper, his right playfully

toying with a watch chain. No camera can photograph the slight flush on the brow, nor the jerks of the fitful breath, nor the frequent excursion of the tongue in its tour around the lips, nor the shifting of the body's weight from one leg to another, nor the rhythmic swing of the elbow, nor the pallor of the cheek which betokens the coming joke, nor the apologetic cough, nor the sorry-to-keep-you-waiting contortion of visage intended for a smile, nor the peroration, nor the final catastrophe when the Churchwarden, amid the applause of admirers, seats himself in mid-air, owing to a mis-judged calculation of the distance to which he originally removed his chair.

By-and-bye, when the detective phonograph is complete, there will be no more Vestry Meetings. On the Tuesday in Easter week there will be, instead, a room open to the public, and fitted up with a screen, a magic-lantern, and a phonograph. Upon the screen the magic-lantern will throw the presentment of the Financial Warden; and the phonograph will echo his speech at intervals of five minutes, between the hours of ten and twelve in the forenoon. Then whosoever lists may enter, if he chooses, and listen to the annual refrain, and go away with the sense of having done all that a respectable parishioner can be supposed to do.

In my University days there was an ancient

tradition that the Latin Sermon, composed by candidates for the degree of Divinity Doctor, had been identically the same during the last three hundred years—a touching witness to the sweet and singular unanimity, in things theological, possessed by our leading Divines. But however that may be, the fact remains that no Churchwarden has ever been able to say anything new at a Vestry Meeting, or to present his accounts in any but the time-honoured manner, which is as follows;—There is the balance-sheet, and that is what he has done with the money; you may accept it, or you may leave it alone; if you do the former he don't mind standing another year; if not, find a better man if you can. I do not say that any Warden could so forget himself as to put the thing so brusquely; but this is the pith of it.

With the formal passing of the accounts, and the election of the new Wardens, the business of a Vestry Meeting is really at an end. But the popular mind holds, and holds firmly, that as a matter of fact it is just about to begin. There is a prevalent belief (which is fast becoming a creed) that all things terrestrial or celestial may be legitimately discussed *now*; it is the people's hour.

The Parson-Chairman, who scents the coming gale, should rise at this point and declare the Vestry to be over. But, as I have said, we are a long-

suffering race, and we love to hear ourselves discussed. This is why there not unfrequently follows an elaborate criticism—more or less wrathful—upon the short-comings and sins of “our Vicar.” No man has yet been able to say why it happens that “our Vicar” is almost invariably a High Churchman, nor why a High Churchman, who faithfully carries out the demands of his Prayer Book, is to endure censure, while his brother Low Churchman may cheerfully omit whatever it pleases him, and yet escape vituperation. Yet you will find that it is so. Possibly the powers of darkness do not care to see a Clergyman too busy, and take this means of resenting it; but I cannot say. Still, when the storm bursts, a Parson has leisure to fold his arms and listen; for he will learn many things—chiefest of all, that ecclesiastical terms have one signification for the theologian, and another for the layman.

Never shall I forget the amazed bewilderment that came upon me, when an irate parishioner—blue-visaged and angry-eyed—demanded of me if it were true that I meditated the placing of an acolyte upon the altar-ledge. Who put him up to it I know not; nor whether he considered altar-light and acolyte to be convertible terms.

Now I had heard of a Priest who was once “served” at a Celebration by an attendant thurible;

and I know another who was charged with having artfully decoyed a sacristy within his altar-rails. There is also the case of the unlucky thurifer, poor thing, who was suspended in chains from the roof immediately over the altar. But I had never heard of an acolyte upon an altar-ledge; and I wondered how he would get there, and what he would do with himself after he had safely arrived.

So I answered my questioner in the affirmative; because, as I was careful to explain afterwards, I had always been brought up to answer a fool according to his folly. When the storm that ensued had continued for some time, I ventured to explain what an acolyte was. There was a dead silence, and the meeting gradually showed itself out into the night.

Again; the conduct of the Services supplies a handy man with a perfect treasury of materials for vituperative criticism. They are too long; too short; too musical; not half musical enough; too frequent; too much given to display; too ethereal; too worldly (I have heard the decorations of a Harvest Festival likened unto the show in a green-grocer's shop). The "Sermons ought never, under any circumstances, to exceed ten minutes;" because, when the Churchwardens are out of pocket at Easter-tide, "you will need half-an-hour at the least to explain things to the people." This is why "a Parson ought always to be able to say what he has

to say in twenty minutes at the outside ;” you see, “people don’t mind listening to details about the schools (*e.g.*) for thirty-five, or even forty, minutes.” In fact “there ought to be more Sermons,” because “you can listen to a good sermon all day ;” therefore, “why not be content to preach periodically ?—say, once a month ”—and so on.

Mr. Balfour, enjoying the exquisite titillation superinduced by a vigorous heckling on the part of the Irish M.Ps., is a pretty sight: he is the model afforded by the outer world of the Parson presiding at a Vestry Meeting. Truly, sufferance is the badge of all our tribe. But, like the Irish Secretary’s—or, rather, the Secretary’s for Ireland—the Parson’s heart is *robur* and his breast *æs triplex* ; and—and lovers of Horace shall finish the quotation for themselves.

But there comes an end to all things ; and it will be found that, as a rule, the barometrical depression of a Vestry Meeting will resolve itself, as it closes, into light and moderate breezes, with fine weather impending. Necessarily so, because there is always the final vote of thanks to the Chairman. This is the time when the Parson is received back again into the fold, and embraced (metaphorically) by the arms of a loving people. He will be told that, although the tongue of a Vestry Meeting may be rough and uncouth yet, its heart is in the right place ; that

although he has been found fault with, he is not such a bad sort after all ; that all men acknowledge his rule to have been wise and tolerant, and his care for the people unremitting in its devotion ; that they might go further, as a Parish, and fare much worse ; and that they hope to see him in the Chairman's seat this time next year.

And so the Parson will go home, and get the wife to sponge the mud from his much-bespattered raiment, and sit him down to a well-earned pipe, marvelling whether it be he or his Parish that has gone mad.

CHAPTER IV.

A VESTRY MEETING (COUNTRY).

FAR away from the din and turmoil of city life, in the very heart of some of the loveliest scenery in England, there lies the happy valley which claims me for its Parish Priest. From my pleasant study window I watch the glow of the summer evening tinting wood and valley, meadow and upland, coomb and tor, with the last good-bye of the sun. Over yonder, where three roads meet, is the blacksmith's forge, which forms at once a depôt for the weekly carrier and a rendezvous for the country gossips. Higher up the valley, and by consequence in a counter-direction to the forge, you will come upon a nest of houses covered with roses, honeysuckle, myrtle, flowering escallonia, and the riches of the earth: these are the homes of the farm labourers. Some quarter of a mile away, if you go on up the hill, you may catch a glimpse of the old Church tower, and you may not, for it lies back from the road, and is

“Bosom'd high in tufted trees.”

But if you are lucky enough to push open an innocent-looking swing gate, and to follow the lane, you will come upon as fair a sight as you may hope to see. For here are lying, in the dreamless sleep, the many generations of the quiet dead, shadowed by a venerable yew, and guarded night and day by the ancient Church—their foster-mother from cradle to grave. There is no fairer resting-place in all this England.

Stand within the old Church Porch—you must get an antiquary to tell you its date—and look out upon the view before you. Twenty miles of glorious scenery—of larch and oak, and elm and beech, and gorse and fern, crowning the heights and sloping down in graduated undulations until they meet the alder-fringed trout stream below. You are a thousand feet, here, above sea level; the only sounds you can hear are the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the chorus of countless birds timed by the diapason of the cawing rooks. Surely the name of this spot is Salem, the House of Peace: could any man stand here and yet have evil in his heart? Wait a bit.

Crossing the Churchyard, and yet without straying beyond its precincts, we come upon a building; what is it? A single doorway, in the long side of it, admits you to some rough stabling; a flight of broken and unfenced steps, on the outside of the shorter wall, will lead you to an upper chamber lighted by two latticed windows. It is a white-

washed room : the iron grate has long since disappeared from the fireplace ; the floor is cranky, and by no means innocent of chasms ; and the ivy has pushed its way through the windows. A long deal table, with two rude forms for seats thereat, and a structure that was once an arm-chair, complete the furniture.

This, if you please, is the Parish Vestry ; underneath it the farmers' horses are tethered while their masters meet in conclave overhead. It is here the village Parliament formulates its statutes and enacts its decrees. Questions relating to land, personal squabbles, rights of way, assessments, rates, repairs of roadways, election of guardians and overseers, parish charities, politics, and matters ecclesiastical—these form a part of the business programme of the sages who sit here in council.

There are many points of interest about our Country Vestry Meeting. An initial difficulty is to induce the Meeting to remove its hat. I think it is the Haytian nigger who assumes the top-hat, or chimney-pot, of civilization when he wishes to appear in full dress ; possibly the tribal etiquette of that favoured locality made its influence felt in these happy islands in the long-forgotten past ; but that point I must leave to modern research.

Then again, we are a strictly eclectic oligarchy : the labourers have neither part nor lot with us, save

at election times. It is then that there are gathered together here, cheek by jowl, land owner, tenant farmer, labourer and hind ; for, however lightly esteemed, the labourer hath his vote. Conscious of that dignity, he will shamelessly intrude his personality into our midst and sit amongst his betters ; more—he will be welcome, and will gratefully purr while candidate and agent vie with each other in pawing him lovingly down the spine. Whether, after all, he will vote on the right side, no man in these days of the abhorred ballot may safely predict. As a rule, and judging by results, he does not.

Next, the minute-book records the doings of each meeting under the following formula : “ Notice having been duly given, the parishioners assembled in Vestry for the purpose of transacting such business as is usual and customary to be done at this meeting.” That heading has all the force of the laws of the Medes and Persians ; it altereth not ; and I very much question if any minute would be considered legal and binding if it failed to be ushered in by this preliminary flourish.

Moreover, the multitudinous subjects of the year's programme, which I have attempted to sketch above, are not to be considered as separate items necessarily. You may be summoned for the purpose of discussing any given subject ; but every parishioner considers

himself entitled to introduce whichever he pleases of the others, and as many as he chooses to select. For instance, personal squabbles are always fought out at assessment meetings. So surely as one farmer outbids his neighbour at a sale, or disposes of his yearlings, hoggets, ewes, lambs, bullocks, calves, hay or pigs, at a higher price than the man next door, so surely may you expect a notice in the Church Porch summoning a meeting for investigating the assessment.

Many a free fight has taken place within these four walls; that is why the furniture is solid, plain and scanty; that is why there are no iron bars left in the fireplace; the holes in the floor have been placed there by the heels of contending hosts, and the armless arm-chair shews where the fight was thickest.

Finally, there is no necessity for consulting the Parson of the Parish with regard to holding a meeting. The dread words "Churchwarden" or "Overseer" sufficiently stamp the notice with formal authority. One such notice lies upon my table as I write. I set it down here in all its plain simplicity, word for word and letter for letter:—

"Notice is hearby Given that there will be
"ameetting of the Perisinors of the Parish of —
"held at the Vestry on Wanesday the fifthe day
"of — at Eleven a Clock in the fur Noon to take
"into Consideration about the Archway

“ Being taken down and Rebuilt that leads out
“ of the Church into the Chanchal

“ And otheare Business relatting to the Church
“ Given under oure hands the Furste Day of —

JAMES BLACK

LUKE POLLARD

Church Wardins.”

You may meet on the Parson’s freehold, and use his room (of which you may keep the key), and you may cause his furniture to dance around to the lively measure of “ Killaloe ;” but that is all you need have to do with him. Or, if you prefer it, you may send round notice privately, appoint your own seconds, and then have at you—one down another come on.

The human elements that go to the composition of our Vestry Meetings are well adapted to the contests in which they play so signal a part.

There is Farmer Widdicombe ; fifty years of age ; with a fist like the blacksmith’s thirty-pounder, and a head like the blacksmith’s anvil for consistency of texture. The coast-line of his capacious waist-coat is like unto the parabola described by the orbit of a comet. Well-fed and well-found is Farmer Widdicombe ; and, on the evenings of market days, a trifle wild-eyed.

Hard by him is Farmer Southcombe, redolent of Sterculus son of Faunus, and habited for evermore in riding attire. Lord of many fields is he, and a

heaven-sent boon to the income-tax collector. He was once Churchwarden of Malmsmead, and does not forget to let people know it.

Flanking him is Farmer Wiseacre, a handsome giant of thirty-five years or thereabout; no bad type of the Right Worshipful Sir John Ridd; yet, withal, of a sharp tongue and an uncertain temper. He is the recognized lawyer of our assemblies, having been odd boy for twelve months in his youth in the office of a conveyancing solicitor.

Over against him sits his shadow—one Farmer Greenfield, with his right eye on the Chairman, and his left on his *vis-a-vis*. This is the man who subjects each account to a severe scrutiny, and who bellows down all speakers—individually or collectively—except the deity over the way.

Beside him you shall find Farmer Vetch, who knows more about assessments than any man living—at least, he says so. Rather under our average height and build; but a man of wire, with fingers ever on the itch for nearer acquaintance with an adversary's nose. He is a man of strange confidences, who never speaks except in undertone, and after a suspicious glance at the door as if he were perpetually expecting minions of the law to enter and arrest him. He is the man who keeps the money-bag; whose accounts are never balanced, and who is under the idea that a number of hiero-

glyphic lines, triangles, and circles scrawled over the pages of a dirty memorandum book may fairly represent the current accounts of the Parish.

The rest of our items may be described as casual hangers-on. They say nothing, but they wait; watching with keen eyes every detail of the proceedings so as to recognize the earliest signs of the coming scrimmage. This much-desired consummation is effected in the following manner:—

Farmer Wiseacre's assessment, let us say, is under consideration, and he naturally desires a reduction; we all do. It is resisted by Farmer Vetch, who, as assessor, remembers that reduction of assessment means diminution of commission. Hurling himself into the arena comes Farmer Greenfield, and the trio carry on the debate, simultaneously, to a running accompaniment of "When I was Churchwarden at Malmsmead" from Farmer Southcombe. Failing to make his voice heard above the din, one of the combatants rises from his seat and leans across the table. His example is immediately followed by the others. This arrangement gives a fair chance for hand to clasp nose in warm embrace, or to rebound to its owner in the event of a too vigorous encounter. Meantime, the man who is taking notes for the minutes, if he be a rapid stenographer, pencils down the following argument—

“ I say the rent’s a hunderd ”—“ it’s a lie ”—“ as good money in the Bank as you ”—“ when I was Churchwarden at Malmsmead ”—“ who’s yer father, come now, who’s yer father ? ”—“ plank a suvrin down an’ I’ll top it wi’ two ”—“ Warden at Malmsmead ”—“ pay me for that muck as I carted over three month ago ”—“ butt an’ ’arness throwed in ”—“ drash, I tull ’ee, drash ! ”—“ I was Churchwarden at ”—“ go home, go home ”—“ at Malmsmead ”—“ be danged to ’ee ”—“ Malmsmead ”—“ I was Churchwarden at Malmsmead.”

The peal has rung itself down ; the clappers are silent ; the tenor bell being the last to speak.

It is almost needless for me to say that the *dramatis personæ* of this little comedy, though all of them Churchmen, belong to different political creeds ; and politics run high in our midst. At sheep-shearing, at Christmastide, and at similar festival times they will be jolly companions at the common board ; at election times they will pass each other in the road with tilted nose and jaunty air. But I like not the complexion of Tory flag or Radical banner in these parts. Not a man of them all but will cheerfully lay down his guinea for a Primrose League Fête or a Home Rule Demonstration ; but the Church must put up with the nimble sixpence.

There is an ancient legend which commemorates the well-known generosity of a certain Tory farmer.

No voice was louder than his, at election times, in its vigorous advocacy of "Church and State;" no man was more beloved by his party as a platform orator. But on a Sunday he was observed to be lustily singing the sweet words—

"Love, so amazing, so Divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all,"

and the Churchwarden was hovering near him, bag in hand. Still the singer sang on; but one finger, deep in his trouser pocket, was carefully investigating the rim of a silver coin to ascertain whether it possessed a rough or a smooth edge—whether it were a "fourpenny" (now happily extinct) or a "threepenny."

Of course, this is a wicked libel; who knows it better than I? But if any man should doubt the truth of the assertion made in the penultimate paragraph above, let him attend one of our Vestry Meetings, and present a subscription list for some necessary improvement in the Church. He will be asked what he is prepared to give himself; what he has invited the neighbouring gentry to do; how much he is likely to squeeze out of his personal friends; what Societies are disposed to be generous. If his replies to this catechism be considered satisfactory, he will be presented with the following items of advice: they do without it in the neighbouring Parish, therefore—why not—eh? Or, let the thing

stand over for a while ; get as many names filled in as possible ; then call another meeting and report ; after that—we shall see what we shall see.

One remembers, of course, the reason why the farthing was introduced into the coinage of Great Britain : it was to give Scotchmen a chance of shewing their generosity. One calls to mind, also, why it was withdrawn ; wags have said it was because the scheme failed of its purpose. As a Scotchman—because, like Homer and Mr. Gladstone (sweet collocation !) I was born everywhere—I resent the imputation with the scorn it deserves ; all I say is, if anybody wants to see generosity pure and unalloyed, let him take round the hat in our Parish for Church purposes.

As I have said, it is different with regard to politics. No time and no money is thought to be wasted so long as it is expended in behalf of a party. In some serious crisis affecting the Church you may be able, by dint of much whipping-up, to command an attendance of half-a-dozen sympathizers at a Vestry Meeting ; if a political question is to be discussed a very small handbill stuck up upon the shutters of the forge will produce a crowd for which you will hardly have standing room. As for the amenities of debate, in the latter instance, the less said the better.

Let me give one such instance by way of illustration.

Not many moons ago the Home Rule Van paid a visit to our quiet retreat in order to hold high revel amongst the chawbacons. We were considered of sufficient importance to secure the attendance of the Liberal agent, a local M.P., and an Irish patriot of no small renown. When I arrived upon the scene the Chairman (our friend, Farmer Wiseacre) was haranguing an excited crowd of sixteen souls; and it seemed to me a disputable point as to which part of the meeting constituted the platform and which the audience, for either contingent might easily have out-hissed the other. Presently, from the outside, was heard the tramp of many feet; and through the widely-flung door appeared the form of Farmer Vetch, with sixty good men at his heels. A personal altercation ensued thereupon between the Chairman of the meeting and the leader of the obtrusive party, during which Farmer Wiseacre was reminded by Farmer Vetch that his (Wiseacre's) father had in his lifetime begged, borrowed, or stolen from his (Vetch's) deceased sire the sum of ninety pounds, value received; and that he (Vetch) would be delighted with the opportunity of contemplating the colour of his (Wiseacre's) money.

Playfully resisting the bewitching invitation of the Chairman to "come onto platform and tull up a bit," Farmer Vetch disposed his mob at the other end of the room, elected himself Chairman of a

supplementary meeting, and proceeded to shew what an all-wise Conservative Government had done for the dear working-man. The effect of the twin meeting was ludicrous in the extreme; but, finally, the platform succumbed, the original demonstration melted away, and the Agent, the M.P., and the Patriot were escorted out of the room to the strains of

“All honour to Lord Salisbury,
The Leader of our Realm.”

I have reason to believe that the safety of the Home Rule Van and its occupants was largely due, that night, to my interference; although I am aware that the Clergy belong to the bloated Tory party, and are numbered amongst the “classes” who neither toil nor spin.

But—as we love to say in our sermons—“time would fail me” to record even the major part of the incidents relative to our assemblies. Besides, outside our Vestry’s door, there waits in patience the figure of the High-Church Warden. “Out, brief candle” upon our Vestry table, stayed by the drippings of thine own tallow. Perchance thou mournest the absence of thine associate stick; but others beside thee have watched its airy flight as it hurtled through the oath-beladen air with deadly intent; and the exercise hath been too much for its iron constitution. Come, thou adorable

minute-book, let us tramp home together. Good ink-pot, thou art only a penny one; but there are blotches upon our walls that tell of thy gallant deeds in the field of Mars. Farmer Vetch, thou hast forgotten thine ancient blackthorn; take it, it may do good service yet. Gentlemen of the Vestry, I bid you farewell.

CHAPTER V.

MY HIGH-CHURCH WARDEN.

I HAVE been singularly blessed in the matter of Church Officers; and I desire, in all true sincerity, to gratefully acknowledge it. Indeed, I think I should find it hard to say whether I am the more indebted to the "High" or to the "Low" Churchwarden—whether to the one who has fought side by side with me through thick and thin, or to the other who has taught me many a lesson of patience and charity by his keen antagonism. It would be a poor world, and we should be ignorant of the many potentialities of our common nature, if there were no such conflict of opinion. We of "the cloth," in particular, should experience far too rosy a time altogether; and how would Her Majesty's Government get on without Her Majesty's Opposition?

Some such thoughts as these present themselves naturally to my mind as I address myself to the task of depicting, that seldom-to-be-met-with commodity in our Parochial staff, the High-Church Warden.

And let me say here that I detest and abhor all

ecclesiastical nicknames. Why one man should be ticketted "high"—as if he were a game bird gone to the bad, and another "low"—as if he were too common even to be cheap, passes my comprehension. Perhaps in the coming future it will suffice us all to be dubbed Catholic Churchmen. It is an honourable title, linking us with the very mainspring of Christianity: we claim it in our Creeds, and we assert it in the order of our Services. Pity it is that we should feel called upon to hoist our several banners, emblazoned with new and strange devices; and not, the rather, to be content with the symbol of Christendom bearing the motto "*In hoc signo.*"

Therefore, if I make use of epithets which obtain amongst us in the present day, it is from no desire to aid in perpetuating them. Far rather would I style my two examples—the Catholic Warden, the un-Catholic Warden; and in this fashion preserve the title of Catholic for both of them.

I well remember, then, the feeling of secret delight I experienced when the intimation was conveyed to me that my friend Mr. Cope was prepared to accept my nomination of him as Vicar's Warden. Not that there is such a thing as a Vicar's Warden, legally: only, in some parts, the custom is not yet extinct of assigning one Warden to the Parson and another to the People.

Artium Magister of the University of Cambridge

was Mr. Cope; a member of the Senate, and prizeman of his college. To him the Prayer Book was an inspired revelation, and its collective rubrics a sacred code. Never, for one moment, would he have brooked the introduction into the Services of aught that savoured of Rome. He strongly held that the ancient use of Sarum—profanely termed by our more advanced brethren, “Aunt Sally”—is the only rightful heritage of our Church. And while he clung to the much-disputed “Ornaments Rubric” with the tenacity of a vice, Her Majesty’s Right Honourable Privy Council—as judges ecclesiastical—were in his idea simply “a pack of old women.” What he thought of the Church Association I never asked him; because his language was fertile in expletive, and his declamation sometimes assumed the force of a tornado.

But I remember that, on a day, he received the intelligence (probably from the same quarter that inspired the idea of the elevated acolyte) that a two-guinea emissary from that body intended to visit our Church on a certain Sunday, and to earn his fee in the usual manner. I did not hear of it until afterwards; but from the restless bearing of our friend I knew that something was amiss.

It was an Easter Day, with its three Celebrations, besides the usual Offices, the Children’s Service, and the After-Meeting at night; but Mr. Churchwarden

Cope was present at all of them. I fear, however, that he managed to cause some fluttering of hearts amongst the congregations; for many complained of the severe scrutiny to which he had subjected them during the day. Nothing suspicious seems to have attracted his notice until the close of the day, when the roving eye of our Warden detected a minion taking notes. The Service ended, Mr. Cope approached the stranger, explained that our custom was to entertain possible angels unawares, desired his more personal acquaintance, and invited him home to supper.

I suppose that few men have been condemned to listen to such a discourse, founded upon the words of S. Paul (Gal. ii. 4, 5), as poured forth from the lips of our Warden that night. But the truth seems gradually to have dawned upon the horrified stranger that the hurtling condemnations which thickened the air were intended for his own soul's behoof.

"What in the name of goodness do you take me for?" he managed to gasp at last. "For a Church Association spy," was the swift retort. "My good Sir," exclaimed the hapless one, "I assure you that I am as strong a Catholic as yourself. Let me explain. I have been studying the art of shorthand, and I was merely taking down the sermon!"

The Church's Calendar, again, was to our Warden a thing to be rigorously followed. Except in cases

of illness, or absence from home, neither he nor his family failed to be present at the recitation of the daily Offices at 8.0 a.m. and at 6.0 p.m. The days of the week he considered as being so many intervals bearing the title of the preceding Sunday; as, for example, the fourth Monday after Epiphany, the twentieth Wednesday after Trinity, and the like. Similarly, correspondents were reminded of their responsibilities with regard to fasting by letters headed, "Vigil of —," "Eve of —;" and the date of the year was invariably prefixed by the letters A.D.

Once, at a seaside watering-place where the Services were not to his mind, our Warden presented himself in the Vestry of the Church, and blandly enquired at what hours Matins and Evensong would be said during the week. The unlucky Parson was not ready with a reply. It was an unfortunate moment for him; because he was promptly pinned by his visitor, and condemned to listen to a certain paragraph culled from the Preface of the Prayer Book, which merely served as a text for a lengthened harangue. "We charge the Romans," concluded our Warden, "with closing the Bible to the people; what else do we do when we forbid them, by our negligence, to hear it read during the week?"

"But I prayerfully hope," interposed the Parson, "that they read it daily for themselves."

“So do I,” was the rejoinder; “but I doubt it. In any case that consideration does not affect the distinct command of the Church in her Prayer Book.”

The upshot of it was that the Parson promised the Services, and the Warden the congregations. This covenant was faithfully carried out during the holiday; but not, I think, afterwards; for in the following summer many enquiries passed from the Vicarage to the village as to whether Mr. Cope and his family had yet arrived.

Indeed, that Preface to the Prayer Book became a powerful weapon—whether for attack or defence—in the hands of our High-Church Warden. I have known him maintain by its aid, at a Diocesan Conference, such a soul-compelling argument as caused the Layman to shiver all down his spine, and the Parson to quake in his Oxford shoes; while Canons and Archdeacons stared aghast at the relentless forefinger singling them out in turn, as patterns whose offices compelled them to be examples to their less dignified brethren. Not always, O my Persius, is it

“Pulchrum digito monstrari, et dicier Hic est;”

far rather, I take it, would that assemblage recall the saw of the merry Flaccus—

“Hic niger est; hunc tu Romane caveto.”

Not that I would depict him as being an obtrusive controversialist, ever on the watch for some adversary to gird at. With all his strong advocacy of Church principles, no one could be more gentle in his charitable thought for those who differed from him. He was simply one of those men who do not care to adopt the title of any particular form of society without accepting the full responsibility of his choice. As a Churchman he felt bound to accept the Church as a whole—not this or that portion of it which appealed to his own instincts. Had he become a newly-initiated Freemason, I am persuaded that he would never have rested until he had passed through the thirty-three degrees which (I am told) precede the knowledge of the Grand Secret.

“If ever I meet an argument,” I once heard him say, “scientific, moral, political, or what not, which conflicts with the principles of the Church, I will either kill it, or it shall kill me.”

Once, however, he was nearly cornered; but a happy thought (was it something higher?) saved him. He was asked by an Atheist whether he believed the Apostle’s dictum that “every creature of God is good.” “Certainly I do,” was his answer. “Then,” asked his antagonist, “why were vermin created?” “I—don’t—know,” he replied; “except it was to teach us to keep ourselves clean.”

Neither could he contemplate, with equanimity,

any idea of parsimony with regard to the appointments of our Church. "Get what is necessary," was his motto, "but let it be of the best." To this principle we were indebted for many minor conveniences which would hardly suggest themselves to one less in earnest than himself. Yet they made all the difference in the world between a sense of reverential decency in our Services, and that constant irritation occasioned by the lack of some adjunct always wanted when it was not there.

He was frequently taken to task, by certain friends of his, about his extravagant notions in this respect; until one, more rash than the rest of his critics, ventured to suggest that the money spent in "fal-lals" might have been more appropriately expended upon the poor. "Ye-es," he admitted, "something of the same kind was said, I believe, about S. Mary when she spent such a lot of money upon that box of ointment; perhaps you can recall the name of the man who found fault with her? Yet, if I remember rightly, her action was called 'a good work;' perhaps money isn't very much thought about where—where you and I are hoping to go to."

One custom which we owe to our High-Church Warden I set down here, because I think it may be usefully carried out elsewhere. We were a large town Parish, and our Services were attended by

many of the poorer people, who did not possess any books of their own. Mindful of this, our Warden caused a shelf to be built against the west wall of the Church, and upon this he placed a large number of Prayer Books and Hymn Books for the use of any who might require them. It was a good idea, and it was largely taken advantage of. Of course in time these books began to shew signs of wear (also tear); they were then collected together, despatched to the Waterside Mission, and replaced by a new stock.

Such little acts of sympathy and forethought are not thrown away, and their cost is not worth consideration in comparison with the many advantages they secure.

"I'll tell you what it is," he said to me one day, "half the people in the world do not know the *luxury* of almsgiving. If they could only be brought to realize the intense delight one experiences in being able to provide this or that for the Church's benefit I am quite sure that we should never be obliged to ask for money again. People would see what was wanted, and supply it at once. Even if one had to go short one's self in order to do it, after all there are plenty of things we could easily go without which we now look upon as necessities."

This is true enough. The difficulty remains of getting people to see it with the same eyes.

In accordance with this principle, he became a subscriber to not a few of the Church societies; and very particular he was in choosing those branches of them which the reports shewed to be most in need of help.

But his generosity brought him trouble. Hardly a day passed by without providing his breakfast table with specimens of the art of the begging-letter writer. They seemed to come from all parts of the kingdom, and to include every form of Church work, known and unknown.

Some of them were stamped with coronets, and signed with the names of dukes and earls; these, of course, were lithographs. Who can resist the seductive charm of a coronet and a title, especially when they address you as "My dear Sir?"

Others reminded the recipient that this was the four-thousand-and-fifty-sixth letter written by the same hand; went on to say that it was very tiring (as no doubt it is; but why do it?) to have to write so many letters, and most depressing to find them not answered; and that, knowing this, you could not have the heart, could you? to refuse a shilling towards Pa's new organ.

Others, again, came from the London districts, where, for instance, a Clergyman—who had cheerfully utilized a garret for Church services during a large number of years—had now made up his mind

to build a Chancel and Nave entirely out of pennies. He therefore begged to enclose you a card, marked in squares, which you would be good enough to fill up at your earliest convenience. Each square must be understood as representing a penny, and you must be sure not to subscribe more than one penny for each particular square. You would, of course, observe that the number of squares on the card corresponded with the number of pence contained in ten shillings—which sum you might send at once, if you liked, and so afford the Clergyman the fun of filling up the squares himself. What happened to the card after that was not immediately apparent.

Others took the form of lordly circulars, glorious with wood engravings of designs for some new centre of parochial organization. You were invited to contemplate the elevation of the Church from the East, from the West, from the North, from the South (like Mr. Pecksniff's elevations of Salisbury Cathedral), from the interior looking East, from the interior looking West ; to gain a more particular idea of the accommodation from a perusal of the subjoined ground plan, not forgetting to glance at the sketches for proposed Schools, proposed Vicarage, proposed Working Men's Clubs—and the rest of it. Half-a-crown in your particular case would be sufficient to set the scheme a-going ; but it should be remembered

that subscriptions must on no account exceed a guinea.

I asked my Warden, once, what he did with these appeals. "I send them back," he said, "for further use; and I include the cost of their postage to me, so that they don't lose anything by their application."

Will the begging-letter writer ever cease out of the land? Will he ever remember that others besides himself have their responsibilities? And will he kindly omit the Country Clergy from his list in the future, when he is reminded that they are obliged to provide for all necessities out of their own pockets?

Was he, then, my Ideal Warden? No! While I have here set down some of his many good points, I have not been unmindful of certain idiosyncrasies which others might classify under the title of faults and failings. But I think that most of them, if not all, were the natural outcome of a mind so absolutely devoted to his creed as to leave him very little sympathy with anything like doubt or difficulty. As a consequence, he was impatient of that slow and gradual method—the "here a little and there a little"—by which a Parish Priest seeks to win his people to Catholic Truth for its own sake. The man who seats himself between two stools proverbially comes to the ground; and if I had given myself up to the guidance of my Warden, knowing as I did

the tenderness of some consciences, the result would unquestionably have been disaster.

But I will not speak of it. Ten years ago I laid him to rest amongst the well-loved ones who had preceded him ; and there he sleeps, waiting for the dawning of that greater Day when all of us shall be understood at last. Peace be to him ! As for me, I hope to grasp his hand again upon the brink of another shore.

CHAPTER VI.

MY LOW-CHURCH WARDEN.

“WHAT do you want with that thing?”
“What thing?”

“That square thing up against the board on the communion.”

“It is called a Burse, and I want it to keep the Altar linen in.”

“Altar! stuff! there’s no such thing as an Altar.”

“What do you call it?”

“A table.”

“Kitchen table? dining-table? or what?”

“Tcha! I suppose you’re going to fling that text at my head about ‘we have an Altar’?”

“I am not going to fling anything; but what is *your* opinion about that text?”

“Well; it don’t mean what you mean.”

“That is to say, the writer did not know what he was talking about? By the way, can you tell me the name of the person who wrote those words?”

“Don’t you know?”

“No; do you?”

“Yes ; Paul.”

“Oh ; thanks !”

This conversation—one of many—took place on a certain Low Sunday when my new Warden was going his rounds with me on a tour of inspection. It was notorious at that time that I was a Jesuit in disguise, whose one aim and object was to lead the people to Rome. Moreover, there were fatal signs of a distinct inclination, on the part of some of the people, to follow that lead ; whereupon a select few had run our friend into office at the recent Vestry Meeting, in order to “keep the Parson down a bit.” I may say, here, that the scheme was certainly successful ; for I have not led them to Rome yet.

Can any responsible man—not a candidate for Hanwell or Colney Hatch—tell me why a High-Church Parson is always itching to lead his people to Rome ? Why not to Switzerland, or the Rhine ? Certainly I should like to go ; but I should prefer to be led myself by somebody who was prepared to pay the expenses.

But if my people as a whole desired to make the trip, I am so conscious of my inability to organize so vast a design, that I should, without doubt, recommend them to apply to Messrs. Cook, the excursionists, for details of the journey. It is altogether too big an undertaking for me to contemplate. Besides, if half the Parsons who have been

accused of this pernicious design were to emigrate with their flocks, our poor old England would be well-nigh depopulated; and then, how would the Government get on without the taxes? The thing will not bear looking into.

But I must beg leave to introduce our Low-Church Warden to a gracious public. There he is, limned on the cover of this book, deeply conscious of his misery as a repentant sinner. The classic cast of feature sufficiently stamps the character of the man; and the stiff under lip is saying as plainly as can well be—"Talk away, my friend, but you don't get over *me*."

Nor was this graceful pose adopted only in moments of confession. It was in this attitude that he usually received my exhortations from the pulpit. The carefully-hidden whereabouts of the hands is also significant; for he told me once that he kept his gold and silver in his right hand pocket and his copper and keys in the left hand one. It was gratuitous information, and I failed, at the time, to catch its meaning. But what it signified was this: "Preach a sermon to my liking, and out comes the generous right hand; talk rubbish, and here's a penny." He was good enough, also, to signal me a warning if the sermon was not, in his opinion, orthodox. If I began to enter upon forbidden ground, there came a rattling of the keys, which

intimated, to all whom it might concern, that the penny would eventually make its appearance in the alms-bag.

I soon found out that he prided himself upon his knowledge of the Bible, or rather those parts of it which seemed to fit in with his own ideas. If he disagreed with any points of ritual or order in our Services, he would challenge me to show him Biblical authority for them. It was in vain for me to urge that the Church was in existence long before any Gospel or Epistle in the New Testament saw the light. I invited him to study Patristic Theology with me; I sent him to the Book of the Homilies, that he might see what the writers said about the authority of the Fathers; I spoke of General Councils, and I invested in Church Histories and made him a present of them. I might as well have used Sidney Smith's broom to sweep away the Atlantic.

At last I became aware that he was one of those who consider that "Sabbath Schools are England's glory." I did not, and do not, share his opinion. However, I asked him one day to show me Biblical authority for Sunday Schools. I had my reward. He said it was a fool's argument, because any means might be taken for the purpose of teaching *Terewth*. He should have paused before making that assertion, because I might have used it with equal force against

himself; but I am not enamoured of the *tu quoque* (or, you're another) argument.

Where does the average Low Churchman obtain his knowledge of how the Services are conducted in the Roman Church? That is a question which I should like answered. I have known so many people who can tell you at a glance whether a Church Service is "Romish" or not that I should very much like to be told how they do it. Such a knowledge would seem to imply that our Low Church friends must spend a good deal of time in Roman places of worship, and busy themselves very extensively in investigating details of ritual and order. Can it be true that our good Protestants sometimes bow themselves down in the House of Rimmon!

Again, it seems to me that our critics on this point rather give themselves away to the Roman controversialist. English Priests, as a rule, have quite enough to do to master the points of their own Church ritual; consequently, there is little or no opportunity left them to study that of other branches of the Church. Would it not seem, then, if our opponents are right, that if we are left alone we instinctively incline to Catholic usage? It is a truly awful thought; let us speculate no further.

Now, our Low-Church Warden, unhappily, was seriously afflicted with this malady of Pope-on-the-

brain ; and I pity any poor sufferer who is bitten by it. It brings on mental jaundice ; it sours the temper, and turns all things into vinegar. It fills the olfactory senses with a noisome odour of brimstone and cinders, and it so enlarges the visual organs as to enable them to detect His Holiness the Pope concealed in various parts of the Church at one and the same moment of time.

The acute sufferings of our Warden frequently caused him to gnash his teeth and to rend his not too plentiful locks. At other times the entire man would be convulsed by a violent eruption. One such outbreak comes to my mind as I write.

“What on earth”—thus it began—“what on earth you fellers want to be always playin’ at Popery for, I dunno ! Seems to me a poor sort of honesty as can ape Rome and yet eat the bread of the Establishment.”

Now, as a preliminary point, I deny that I eat the bread of any establishment—except my own. What “*the Establishment*” is, *par excellence*, I have never been able to find out.

But I said, “Suppose you tell me what there is about me, for instance, that is Popish.”

“Why,” said he, “yer coat’s Popish ; and yer collar’s Popish ; and the white gown you wears is Popish—half-way up yer legs and no gathers like they used to be. An’ what with bowin’s and scrapin’s

an' cuttin' up an' down, sometimes I think a'most us might as well be in Bedlam playin' the fool all round."

I did not retort upon him that the blue waistcoat stamped with little sprigs of pink flowers, which was his pride, was hideous to behold ; nor that the white necktie he wore was simply grotesque ; nor that the cut of his pantaloons belonged to a far-off past, and the patriarchal fob-guard to the last century. But as I was anxious to know what I looked like when bowing and scraping—particularly scraping—I invited him to explain his own terms. But the issue only resulted in the revelation of a new term, of which I should like to know the derivation. It seems that the contortions described by him are only detailed developments of a primal state known amongst authorities as "mee-maws."

Now what is a mee-maw? May we classify, under this generic term, the firmly-seated attitude of the man who with chin supported on hands, and elbows on book ledge, surveys the congregation while his lips are repeating the words of the General Confession? Is that a mee-maw? Or does it include the erect position assumed by the man who, after arriving at his seat in the Church, proceeds to survey the inside of his hat? Are we at liberty, when we behold the genial nod of acquaintance from one side of the Church to the other, or the friendly grin of recognition, or the beckoning finger that

invites to a more neighbourly seat, or the effect of the whispered communication of some good joke heard yesterday, or—are we at liberty, I ask, under any or all of these circumstances to say, “Kismet! it is mee-maw?”

“Tell ye what,” he went on; “if you chaps had your way, you’d turn the Prayer Book upsy-down. It says plain enough in the roo-brick as you can ‘say’ the Service as well as sing it. You don’t do neither. What d’ ye want to drawl it all out for, sing-song? Why not speak up like a Chrishtyun? Why, when I was a boy, it were thought quite good ’n uff for the Clerk to say Haymen; besides, it says Minister, Clerks and People in the Prayer Book. Nowadays, us ’as to spend thirty shillin’s a week for a Kyre (Choir) to do it. Waste o’ money I calls it.”

Can one argue with such a being? Mention to him that “saying” the Service is, according to all custom and authority, the recitation of the Office in monotone, and that the “singing” it implies the use of inflected tones. Tell him that the word “Clerks” means singing Clerks, and therefore presupposes a Choir. What is the result? It is this, “Ta-ta-ta! d’ ye take me for an idyut? can’t I read English?” One might cheerfully answer both questions in the affirmative; but it would not forward the success of the argument.

One afternoon I was the happy recipient of a new revelation. I was at work in the Vestry, engaged in the preparation of certain Church business, when two visitors entered the Church. From the sound of the voices I recognized one as belonging to our Warden, and the other to some unknown friend. In a short time they came to examine the pulpit, which was close to the Vestry door, and I could not choose but hear what was going on.

Said the friend, "I s'pose you've a pretty bad time with your Parson?"

"Rather!" was the dry reply; "shouldn't wonder if I woke up some day to find myself a Roman Catholic. I gets a bit flummoxed learning new names and things, an' I hain't got the hang of 'em all yet. This 'ere thing is what they calls a hante-pendulum; that over there's the fool's-stall, where they reads the Let'ny from. I ast our Clerk t'other day what *he* called hisself; an' he said he were a Parroter; but he don't parrot none, for he ain't allowed even to say Haymen. An' then, when I come to ast the Parson what *he* called him, blest if he didn't say he were a virgin!"

"Does he wear a gown?"

"Who?"

"Your Parson."

"Not he; too 'igh. Mos'n gen'ral he wears a hassock, a cirkliiss, an' a ribbin. Sometimes his

ribbins is blue, sometimes white ; but he wears 'em red mostly."

As, up to this point, my admonitory coughings had failed to apprise the worthy two of my whereabouts, I thought it time to make an appearance. I therefore opened the Vestry door to shew them what was behind it. Mutual salutations over, coupled with a "'appy to make yer acquaintance" from the unknown, I invited them both to stay for the daily Evensong of which our bell was giving notice. Unfortunately, they were engaged elsewhere, and I was obliged to forego the pleasures of any further criticism.

Will there ever come a day, in this world, when the long-suffering Parson shall be credited with knowing something about his own profession ? The prescriptions of the Doctor are faithfully carried out ; the Solicitor's opinion is accepted and acted upon ; yet any neophyte considers himself perfectly qualified to wave a contemptuous dismissal to the counsel of a Clergyman. Somehow it seems as if things should be otherwise. Robbie Burns sighs (in metre) for the gift which will enable us to view ourselves in the same light in which others regard us. That is all very well ; but, as a Parson, I should dearly love to watch the results that would ensue if others could be brought to contemplate us with the same introspection that we bestow upon

ourselves. Let us have some credit for doing our best. Most of us have learned by hard experience that it is no easy task to act as gubernator at the parochial tiller; and if at times the outer skin of a Parson is a trifle porcupiny, there is a warm heart beating inside the rough exterior. Antagonism and contradiction may be good for us; but I think mutual sympathy and affection are better. I doubt the final good of the one; I am well assured of the successful results of the other.

But I have yet to say farewell to our Low-Church Warden. The official "good-bye" took place at the Vestry Meeting that followed his election; and on this occasion he delivered a valedictory oration. It was to the following effect:—

"Ladies and gentlemen, leastways I *should* say Mr. Chairman and fellow-parishioners—Twelve months ago you put me into office to look after our Vicar here. Well, I've done my best; but him and me don't hit it off, and I should like somebody else to have a try. You know, I like a plain Service and a good old Gospel sermon; he don't. Likely enough, he knows more about things than I do; but a man of my age isn't likely to give up in a hurry what he's been accustomed to all his life. Bestways not argify with him, for he can talk the hind leg off a helephant; and you never know whether he's speaking serious or laughing inside. There's one thing, you can't

make him angry—not that anybody wants to; but I fancy I've said a good deal more than I ought to have done, and if he's hurt I beg his pardon. Take him all round, and swallowing his ideas, I don't think you'll meet with a better. And as there isn't going to be any bad blood between us, here's my hand and good luck to our Vicar."

I think that speech of his hit the proverbial nail square on the head. No doubt the training and habits of years fashion for us a second nature. There follows the evident moral—Parsons, look to the little ones. Let your principal care be for them. Train them up, from babyhood, in sound Church principles. Lay hold with a strong hand upon young men and maidens. Never mind present results; he that sows for the next world must not expect to reap in this. Look upon your Mission as one that is working for the future. Through evil report, and good report, remember that you are not isolated units, but Priests of the Church of God.

And then, in a happy time to be, there will be neither "High" nor "Low"; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. Men will begin to look for the reign of Peace, and there will be one universal prayer—"That they all may be one."

CHAPTER VII.

OUR PAROCHIAL TEA-POT.

NOT a few of my readers will be able to claim, at least an elementary, acquaintance with that form of parochial dissipation which consists in quaffing tea and listening to speeches. Not a very ambitious ideal, one would suppose, for spending a rollicking evening; yet the fact remains that there are few—I question if there are any—more popular modes of recreation hitherto invented.

Now you shall find that the parochial tea-pot differs in kind, and in degree, with the social status of the parishioners in whose honour it is periodically brought forth. You may come upon it in all the pride and glory of solid silver, with cream-jug and sugar-basin to match; or you may be confronted with it as it stands alone in the humbler guise of pewter or of delf. It may take its place at the eminently aristocratic eighteenpenny ham-sandwich table; it may make its appearance on the poverty-stricken sixpenny bread-and-jam board and tressels; yet, in whatever character it may present itself, it is

to the parishioner a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.

But if you would meet with the parochial tea-pot in all the plenitude of popularity; if you would realize to the full the cheeriness, yet not inebriety, which Cowper has attached to its companion tea-cup, you must seek it (or them) in the northern parts of our England, amongst the lads and lassies of the manufacturing towns, whose streets echo ever, night and day, to the beautiful clang of the wooden shoon.

Ah, me! how often has my tired spirit been soothed and charmed to rest by the strains of that too generous melody! How often have the jaded senses quickened into living vigour at the rhythmic beat of the "clocketty-clock, clocketty-clock," hammering out its eternal anthem upon the paved roads! How often have I gazed in rapture upon the mysterious subtleties of the clog-dance!—the light and agile step; the poetry of the poised and tremulous limbs: the musical slap of the timing heel; the ravishing charm of the stolid mouth softly whistling an accompaniment which none of our greatest composers have ever dared to imitate. Talk of "the stately minuet!"—"the gay saraband!"—the majestic cadence of gavotte or tarantelle!

My reader, knowest thou the clog-dance of the north countree? Is it thine to discriminate, at a

glance, between the winsome “fling” and the merry “double-shuffle?” is thine ear attuned to catch the difference between the tap of the heel and the toe-flop? and hast thou not a shrewd suspicion in thine own mind that thou art being led astray? and that ’twere better far to get us back, as quickly as may be, to the tea-table? if we are ever to know what is the gist of this particular chapter.

Well, then; it is at the Annual Parochial Tea-party that you meet other characteristics of our “trusty and well-beloved.” If the Easter Vestry Meeting may be said—as may it not?—to correspond, ecclesiastically, to the Budget-night of the People’s Parliament, the Annual Parochial Tea-party may be said to form the counterpart of the yearly Banquet at the Mansion House. In what particulars you shall presently see.

Yet, again, there is a difference. I am given to understand that at the Lord Mayor’s princely feast the guests sing the song of—

“Drink to me *only* with thine eyes”

to the ladies in the gallery. These, it seems, are permitted to gaze upon the plains that flow with milk and honey, yet must they never know the taste thereof. Now, at *our* Annual Banquet of tea and jam—yea! it may be of sandwich and of dripping toast—ilka laddie has his lassie; Joan may sit

beside her Darby, and squeeze hands under the table; and our Mary Eliza (the eldest of eight, ma'am) may bring along the baby, so that we can all be comfortable together.

Perhaps, however, the Lord Mayor has his reasons for declining to follow our lead in this matter.

Hark! the door has just swung open; there are sounds of voices, of scraping of feet, of stamping of shoe-leather; and, amidst a clapping of hands, there enter two objects—of keen interest for the rest of the evening.

"Who's yond?" asks Mrs. Perkins of her friend Mrs. Lipton. "Them's our two Wahrd'ners," says Mrs. Lipton; "fust un's Pahs'n's Wahrd'ner, t'other's people's; fancies 'mselves a bit, too." "Ah!" rejoins Mrs. Perkins, "they favvers our'n 't Sant James's; mich of a michness all raound, I doubt."

The subjects of these unkind remarks are pulling off their great coats, the while their eyes include the whole of the assembled multitude in a comprehensive glare—strongly suggestive of their intention to administer immediate personal chastisement to the collective body of guests. Our senior Warden's next proceeding is to run his fingers through his hair, to place his arms a-kimbo and his legs wide apart, to fix his gaze upon the wall at the end of the room, and thus to give the people

a chance of beholding the champion of their rights and liberties. Etiquette will forbid the junior Warden to adopt a similar attitude; but it will allow him to act as attendant on the greater man—an abstracted look, a gentle chafing of the hands, and a smile of vacancy, being the most approved signs of subservience.

But our banquet is nearly over; otherwise, the Wardens would not be here. The dignity of office may tolerate, but may never hope to shew sympathy with, the depraved palate of the baser sort. "Thanks, we had a little snack before we came." "Not any, thanks." "No, thanks."

I would that I might linger awhile to recall some of the characteristics of the feast itself; but our Wardens are waiting, and the platform is ready. It only remains that the tea-tables be transformed into seats, that the guests of the evening change themselves into an audience, and straightway we enter upon the second part of the entertainment—the speechifying.

There is a time-honoured custom on these occasions. The Parson is asked to take the chair (which belongs to nobody but himself), and to "say a few words." The latter request is to be accepted in its strictest and most literal sense. In fact, the Chairman may say as little as he pleases—the less the better—because *he* is not the hero of the hour.

And while the Chairman says his small say, the audience is wondering :—what Mr. Churchwarden will have to say ; whether the Parson is going to catch it ; whether they themselves are in for a blowing-up ; whether he is intending to skirmish all round, generally ; above all, what is the new scheme for which they will be asked to turn out their pockets—until they are recalled by the words, “ I now beg to call upon our senior Churchwarden.”

And here it should be observed how truly beautiful is the comparison I have suggested between our Annual Banquet and that of the Lord Mayor at the Mansion House. At the latter, the guests are impatient for that long-looked-for speech of the Prime Minister which will presently be echoed in the ears of the listening earth. After him will arise the Chancellor of the national Money-box, to tell the long-suffering tax-payer how many pennies he is likely to be able to spare him when he comes to count up the contents.

Well ; is not the parallel sufficiently complete ?

What has the Prime Warden to say ? This.

That when we met together, on the last occasion, it did not become him—if you remember—to assume the position he now fills so unworthily ; because, in point of fact, it will be well within the memory of those he sees around him that he had not been summoned to the proud dignity he now has the honour

to occupy ; in a word, he was not in office. Another, whom he will not more particularly specify, had held the place of Prime Warden—one for whom he entertains feelings of the highest respect ; but with whose mode of government he has, unhappily, no single point of sympathy. That we will draw a charitable veil over the mournful details of a painful past—the extravagant amounts expended in gas bills ; the pounds that have been wasted in knick-knacks ; the general squandering of money right and left, of which his friend over there (the Exchequer Warden) knows more than he does. That you have put him into office to look after things ; very well, you may depend upon his doing it ; and that he desires to take this opportunity of warning our Vicar that he and his colleague intend to put down a firm foot upon the expenditure of one brass farthing, in any possible item, for which they cannot see a sufficient reason.

Turning, for a moment, to foreign affairs, he may say that our relations with other Parishes continue to be uniformly friendly. True, some slight dispute had arisen with regard to a boundary in the South-West extremity of our territory ; but negotiations had taken place between the high contracting Powers which had resulted in a reference to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners as arbitrators, whose award, when it was known, would doubtless command a general

approval. With this single exception; there is nothing to disturb or menace the present peaceful outlook.

That the present defences of the Church are totally inadequate to meet the continued encroachments of the Town Council, whose methods of acquiring territory under the guise of paving improvements are too well known to need further comment. You will, therefore, need a strong and substantial defence of your boundary line—upon a purely scientific basis—in the shape of a four-foot wall, armed with *chevaux-de-frise*, to serve as a means of notifying to all comers that any further inroads will be accepted as a *casus belli*. Estimates as to the probable cost have been prepared, and will be laid before you by the Vicar in a future sermon.

With regard to domestic policy, a series of suggestions are in course of preparation which will be laid before your representatives in Council assembled. To speak more particularly upon them now would be to invite criticism—not only at home but abroad. As this is strongly to be deprecated, he will content himself with saying that the schemes they hope to carry are, in their opinion, commensurate with the highest interests of the people.

That he has kept you too long already, and time is getting on. That we shall meet again, he hopes, this time next year; and that, on that occasion, it

will be possible for the meanest intelligence to discern whether his forecast of the future was, or was not, a mistaken one.

(From all of which it will be gathered that the Prime Warden is almost as clever at saying nothing in a good many words as the Prime Minister whom he typifies.)

The heart of the nation—of the meeting, I mean—is relieved. Nobody has been blown up, although the Parson has had warning. What can *that* mean, now? Something behind, no doubt; but wait. Still there is that awful wall, and walls mean money. However, what has our Exchequer Warden to say?

It appears that he has a good deal to say.

It may not have occurred to this meeting—and the memories of parishioners, generally, are proverbially obtuse under all such circumstances—that his predecessors in office left a deficit on the current account to the tune of five and twenty pound; and that, if things are not looked into, this sum will speedily double itself before a man can say, Whence art thou? Mention has been made of a certain boundary wall; and he understands now, for the first time, that estimates have been prepared. Would it be thought too impertinent if he asked somebody (who might be in the secret) to inform him whether *contracts* for the work had been already accepted? He is glad to hear that some generous person proposes to carry

out so eminently desirable a work. But as a matter of curiosity, merely, he would like to know who is going to pay for it.

(This, it will be observed, is as if the National Chancellor of the Exchequer should ask the delighted House who they thought was going to pay the national bills, and whether he might be favoured with the name of the lucky hundred-millionaire who had undertaken to do it.)

“Thee—ah—offertory account,” continues our financier, pretending to search for a paper which, as he is perfectly aware, is immediately underneath his nose, “does not shew the marked increase which would justify us in undertaking any new plans for the present. For my own part, I don’t mind the accounts being a trifle in debt; it keeps our Vicar, here, from running into other extravagancies. Put him out of debt, over one account, to-day; and he’ll be head over ears in debt again, next week, over another.”

(Observe, again, that the object of all good Christians in contributing to the Offertory should be, not the furtherance of God’s glory, or the honour of His Church but, the indemnification of the Warden against all pecuniary risk—a truly valuable distinction, upon which we may usefully ponder. The remainder of the tune proceeds in the same sweet strain.)

“What I should like to see is—more people at the Services. There are seven hundred and fifty sittings in the Church; if these were all occupied, and people did what in them lay, we should be making ten or twelve pound a Sunday. We could afford to be a little less particular then; but until that time comes, I shall want to know who is going to find the money if any new plans are to be taken in hand between now and next Easter.”

With which delicate intimation of his intended retirement, as of one wearied with the claims of official life, our financial Warden subsides.

There is a musical programme still to be gone through before the meeting terminates; but, to our bitter grief and disappointment, the Wardens are annually unable to remain with us any longer. “Fact is, we’re a quarter of an hour too late already for a most important engagement; very sorry; *good night*.”

Alas! their departure is watched with wistful eyes. The door swings back once more, is closed, and they are gone! Somehow, the brilliancy of the evening has gone with them; the songs are stale, flat, and unprofitable; the piano is all out of tune; the comic man, of whom so much was expected, is a palpable and hideous failure; surreptitious hands among the audience are stealthily feeling for wandering head-gear; a simultaneous

rising of the two back seats betokens the coming exodus ; and the Chairman-Parson awakes to the sound of a friendly voice—

“Jolly sort of evening for you ; must have enjoyed yourself immensely ; suppose you come home to supper with me, and forget all about it.”

CHAPTER VIII.

OUR PARISH COUNCIL

THERE is a certain fidgetty M.P. who, with a persistency worthy of a better cause, is always endeavouring to introduce a little Bill into Parliament for the enforced establishment of Parochial Councils. The principle of the thing seems to be that all Parishioners should have a voice in the management of their Church, its Services, and its organizations; in a word, that the Church should become a Congregationalist section.

And a truly blissful experience would accrue to that Parson who should become the victim of such an arrangement; for he would speedily find himself a mere puppet whose spasmodic jerks would be regulated by the strings in the hands of his people. Thus; High-Churchman A, by packing his meeting, might command such a highly ornate Service on the following Sunday as would turn weaker brethren into dancing hystericals. Low-Churchman B on the Sabbath ensuing might, by the self-same tactics, put the Organ to silence, strip the Choir, and clothe

the Parson in gown and bands—to the rage and dismay of the more advanced party. As a comic drama, no doubt the thing would “draw,” and the threepenny-bits and coppers would flow in. In fact there is no end to the ingenious arrangements for high-jinks which might at once be invented by a well-ordered mind.

Unhappily, however, the Author of this highly-facetious scheme seems to have overlooked one point. Before Her Gracious Majesty’s seal is affixed to his Bill it might be well for him to ask himself how many of the Clergy would be prepared to accept so degrading a position. To be the commissioned guide and friend of the souls committed to him is one thing; to exchange that dignity for the character of a marionette in a raree show is quite another. Statute law has already done, is still doing, and will continue to do, a great deal towards bringing our Office into contempt; but I very much question if it will succeed in prevailing upon us to doubt the validity of our commission. We dance to a good many strings already; another set might cause our sorely-tried joints to fly asunder. “*Quieta non movere*”—the principle of letting sleeping dogs lie—is the best motto for that Bill which I can think of just at present.

Yet that “something must be done” is a creed which applies to every department of life in these

days of topsy-turvy. Wherefore, once upon a time, I set myself the task of doing that something, and this is how I fared. I wrote two letters; one to a brother Parson who had already tried his hand at a Parochial Council, and the other to a layman who was a distinguished member of it. The replies amused me. Said the Parson, ". . . the main idea of our Laymen seems to be that they were elected to handle the money, and to instruct the Vicar in his duties. I have heard of hornets' nests, but I have never had any experience of them until now. Take my advice, and have nothing to do with it."

"It is a good idea," wrote the Layman, "but it does not work. If our Vicar wants any money for a Curate or a tea-party, we have the privilege of finding it. Upon all other points he will receive our advice with a gracious inclination of the head, and immediately proceed to carry out his own ideas. The whole thing is a farce."

Armed with these hints I made arrangements for the founding of a Parochial Council. At our annual Vestry Meeting we elected two Wardens and two Sidesmen, and these I formed into a Church Board, with myself as odd man; but upon the understanding that I who had called them as a body into existence could as easily dissolve them into atoms. I may mention that this Board—allowing for the annual change of members—continued in existence for the

five years that I spent in the Parish afterwards, and that I found it of the greatest possible service.

Our mode of procedure was simple, and we preferred unwritten laws to a more defined code. On the last Thursday evening in every month we met, alternately, in each other's houses. As we were all business men who had come straight from our offices, our first care was to discuss a supper which was strictly limited to certain viands. Supper ended, the host of the evening became the Chairman of the meeting, and we proceeded to take into consideration the affairs of the Parish. Monthly accounts were passed, and cheques drawn for payment; the Bank-book was examined, and provision was made for keeping our balance in credit; days were fixed for special Sermons; and, indeed, the whole routine of Parish organization was planned and arranged for. Thus we were always a month beforehand in our business, and were able to provide in time for coming contingencies.

To the outside world we were an austere and solemn convention; but in reality we were nothing of the kind. Somehow there grew up between us a sympathy and attachment that kept us always in touch with each other; and, however much we might differ, we never carried a question to the vote or separated without coming to a thorough understanding. I think the mere fact of Parson

and representative men meeting together at regular periods became a subtle bond of union between us. None of us acted without the others ; and the people knew that, if they had a grievance, they had only to mention it to one of us in order to secure its discussion at our next meeting.

I remember, for instance, that at one of our meetings our senior Churchwarden—a long legged man—drew attention to the fact that the chairs, which constituted the seatings in our Church, were placed so closely together as to leave him no kneeling room. Others, he said, had complained of the same thing ; might not a few rows be taken out so as to give our people greater ease and freedom ?

This innocent suggestion formed the basis of a good deal of waggy. One of our Sidesmen proposed that the congregation should be invited to send us the length of its legs, so that a redistribution of seats might be effected. But it was pointed out that the carrying out of this idea would lead to such a complexity of mathematical graduations as to require the genius of a Girton Senior Wrangler. The motion was therefore, by unanimous consent, withdrawn. He then suggested that the seats should be labelled, “for long lengths,” “for medium lengths,” “for short lengths ;” but the Chairman ruled that the honourable member was verging on ribaldry, and that he would none of it. Crushed

and defeated, our Sidesman lighted a new cigar, and blew away his disgust in a happy cloud. But the Churchwarden carried his point.

For those who desired to communicate with us the more readily we had a post-box fitted up at the west end of the Church. It consisted of an inclined plane of wood (for writing purposes) which, on being raised, disclosed a supply of pencils and paper, and a box which received the missives through a slit. This box was cleared every Sunday evening, and its contents were handed over to the Secretary of our Council.

Many curious letters found their way to our meetings through this medium. I well remember the very first; it was as follows—"Come and help me to get rid of a couple of brace of grouse next Wednesday, 7.30 sharp." Now the writer had omitted to address his epistle to either of us; we therefore took counsel together, and came to the conclusion that the invitation extended to all of us. Accordingly, we presented ourselves in a body at our friend's house, much to his delight—as was proved by his ordering up the contents of his larder.

Our chief correspondent was the Aged Clerk (or "virgin") who was always in want of something. "Gentlemen," he would write, "there is new bars wanted for the furniss in the hetting seller bars is wore thru and cannot undertake to kape no fires in

unless they renewd also fire rake and shovel more coak and a pick ak for them docks in the church yard has tried iron bars for them but my opinion that roots goes thru to californy youre humble servant to command."

A literary hardy annual, also, was in full bloom about the time of the visit of Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools. I quote a sample—

"To the Parochial Council in meeting assembled. Gentlemen,—The Head Master, Assistants, and Teachers of your Schools, desire to lay before your generous consideration the following, viz.:—

- I. That the recent Inspection of your Schools has been highly satisfactory.
- II. That not a single failure has been scheduled in Standards I., II., III.
- III. That the Infant School has been classed 'Excellent.'
- IV. That the upper Standards have obtained special grants in History, Geography, and Singing.
- V. That the Government Grant exceeds that of last year by twenty-five pounds (£25).
- VI. That the holidays are about to begin.
- VII. That a rise of salary, in the shape of bonuses, would be a welcome and acceptable help to us all.

"Trusting that these considerations will have due

weight with your meeting, your petitioners will ever pray."

Sometimes the communications we received were forcible, *e.g.* :—

"Gentlemen,—I have repeatedly drawn your attention to that cracked tin-pot in our choir, who calls himself a tenor. Human flesh and blood can stand it no longer. Unless he is instantly dismissed it is my firm determination to withdraw my annual subscription."

Others appeared regularly from our organ-blower—

"Aunt of mine died last night in Yorkshire, got to go to furnerill, glad to draw next quater money, and a trifle extry if agreeable."

The only difficulty about this correspondent was the amazing number of members of his family who were called untimely to their end. Cousins, uncles, nephews and nieces, grandfathers and grandmothers, brothers, friends—every available relationship—were incessantly being mown down by the remorseless scythe. Our poor friend buried no less than fifteen loved ones in a single year; and it was not until we discovered that attendance at their obsequies produced odours of brandy and a tendency to somnolence, that it occurred to us to relegate this series of epistles to the waste paper basket.

Nor were letters the only things which found their

way into our post-box. Various misguided members of our community, supposing it to be an alms-box, were accustomed to insert coins, linen buttons, peppermint lozenges, cobblers' wax, glutinous excretions, and the other usual contributions which generally find a home in these receptacles. One of our Wardens surprised a well-intentioned female on a certain occasion endeavouring to cram a newspaper through the receiving slit under the impression that the box was a depository for periodicals intended for the use of inmates at the General Hospital. He very kindly took charge of the precious journal, promising to forward it to the desired destination; but the indignant lady grasped an offensive-looking umbrella and departed wrathfully.

To set ourselves straight, we published a notice in the Church porch drawing attention to the printed statement over the post-box, which explained the uses thereof. To this we appended a list of the extraneous articles which had so strangely lost their way, coupled with the intimation that they would willingly be restored to their owners if application were made for them in the Vestry. After that we had no further trouble.

Of course I have limited myself, in this chapter, to the lighter side of our periodical meetings; to have attempted any description of the business details would have involved too great a demand upon the

patience of my readers. Still, a considerable amount of solid work was gone through on every occasion ; and I think our laymen were astonished to find how increasing and varied were the subjects which called for their attention and interest.

I have said, before, that some such scheme as this would greatly facilitate all successful work in a Parish. But then, I have no idea of a Warden, or any other Church officer, who is merely a sleeping partner. We need all the unity of energy we can command to send the good Church along in paths of peace and prosperity ; who can strengthen a Clergyman's hands so well as the laymen he has called about him ?

I am but a voice, and nothing more ; but, if I had my way, I would so bellow myself into the ears of some individuals I know as to galvanize them into active life. I was once present at the performance of a theatrical play intituled, " The Duke's Motto," the plot of which seemed to consist, wholly and solely, in the very inconvenient appearances of a figure in slouched hat and voluminous robes, who shouted in stentorian tones, " I ahm he-e-ere !" Such an one would I be ; and no Church Officer should be able to say at what moment in his life that dread message might not tickle his own aural tympanum. He should go in terror all his days until I had induced him to hurl away the frock-coat

of inanition and to set to work in the shirt-sleeves of zealous labour.

I shall probably be told that the lay-Churchman is only too willing to co-operate in all good works with his Clergyman. I have heard laymen say—not once nor twice—"Oh! you know, our Parson's too high and mighty; he stands on a superior platform far above our heads. Give us some work to do, and we'll soon set about it." Yet I have been told by their respective Vicars, "I assure you that I have invited the co-operation of the laity at meetings, from the pulpit, privately, and in every way that I could think of; yet you see the result." In fact, I myself am a witness to this truth. For two years I once managed a large Sunday School in the North with only one teacher to help me. At this present moment I possess no single lay-helper who will even lend a hand at getting up a tea-party or a concert. But I have not abandoned "the Duke's Motto," and people are beginning to turn quickly down a by-path when they see me coming.

Courage! my reverend brethren! "*Gutta cavat lapidem*" is an ancient tag enough; but what though? 'twill serve.

CHAPTER IX.

MY IDEAL WARDEN.

THE annual tourist who visits North Devon by the aid of flying coach, noisome steamer, or pestiferous railway, departs homeward with a keen sense of satisfaction at having seen all that there is to be seen. Nevertheless, I could whisper to him of a hundred fair scenes which the eye of stranger has never looked upon, and whose beauties are still unmarred by the clasp-knife of the casual tripper. I believe that Lynton, for instance, is vaunted high as the Queen of the South and West; yet know I of scenery within a dozen miles of Lynton which no pen of poet may describe, nor artist's pencil faithfully depict. One such scene lies (for me) in the sunshine of many happy memories.

It is a dainty valley, full of a thousand beauties that reveal themselves to the traveller step by step—yet half reluctantly, as a bashful maiden reveals her charms and graces to a newly-found lover. From either side the valley slope, and climb, and tower the big tors, glorious with I know not what of tree,

and fern, and copse, and undergrowth so rich and lavish as to cause a feeling of rapturous delight. Flanking the road are hedges—think of it! whole hedges!—of fuchsia, jessamine, veronica, rhododendron, azalea; and such a display of fern, and lichen, and moss, as cannot be pictured by words. No such shrubs are to be found as grow here in perennial magnificence, for winter is unknown. No such vegetation—whether you speak of luxuriance or of unending variety—can vie with this home of the summer sun. And all adown the valley comes the tinkle of the prattling stream, babbling ever of the glories it has passed by, until it is lost in the ample bosom of the generous sea.

Let us stand upon this rock-bound shore, where the music of the stream is hushed in the thunderous antiphon of pulsing tides. Bathe yourself in the spray-clouds that follow the ponderous rush of the giant waves. What coast but this could withstand the onset of such a sea! You are fronting, my friend, the majesty and pride of the Atlantic; and all the hollows of the valley behind are echoing back a thousand jubilant voices—as who should say, “The sea is His, and He made it; and His Hands prepared the dry land.” Could any man stand here and say, in his heart, “There is no God?”

Why do I love to linger over the memory of this tiny Paradise? Partly because my pen has run

away with me, partly because it was here that I made the acquaintance of my Ideal Warden. That gabled house which you see over there, half-way up the valley—no! no! a little more to your right; yes, there!—is the home of the Churchwarden of this Parish. Those terraced gardens are his pride, for they furnish the flowers for the Church's Altar, Sunday after Sunday. On the great Festivals those conservatories you see will joyously render up their choicest treasures; they exist for no other purpose. You will find in that garden, too, a choice collection of all the beauties the valley offers; it is dedicated to Church purposes in generous gratitude to the Giver of all good gifts.

Opposite the house, or rather fronting the principal gateway, is the Church itself. Not a very lordly edifice architecturally; but the door is open, and we may enter freely. Look at this beautifully illuminated notice in the porch, with its simple framing of oak. It asks you not to leave the Church without commending Priest and people to the loving care of the Church's Lord; will you do it?

How scrupulously clean and orderly is this House of God! You will search in vain for cobweb, or dusty corner, or forgotten niche; for this Warden makes it his business to inspect the Church at the end of each week, and woe betide the caretaker if his searching glance should light upon even the dis-

placed corner of a carpet. You admire the Chancel? Well, it is worth looking at. But everything that it contains—marbles and tiles, service books and markers, stained glass and altar plate, credence, piscina, and whatsoever else—are a memorial gift that speaks of a deathless sorrow, and you and I have no right to pry into its history.

This is the Vestry, which is more like a clergyman's private study for comfort and convenience. At this table the Parson may write at his ease; that one is used for arranging the altar vessels. Underneath it, you see, is the iron safe that holds the ancient registers and other documents.

You will never find that inkstand unfilled, nor a pen that is unfit for use, nor blotting-paper that has absorbed a twelvemonth's ink, nor an empty water jug, nor a soapless soap dish, nor a dirty towel. For the Warden of this Parish has an eye to all these things; and he knows that trifles, after all, make up the sum of human life. To him a duty is a duty; there are no degrees of great or small.

If you were here next Sunday—half-an-hour before the Service—you would see, through the opening door, the cheery face and extended hand of my Ideal Warden as he enters with his weekly salutation of "Good morning, Vicar!" No business topics, no disagreeable news, no grumblings or complaints, ever mar the peace of this holy day, or unsettle the

calm of the Parson's mind. Vicar and Warden will both be engaged presently in the Church's Service ; all outside matters must wait until Monday.

It is hardly necessary to say that my Ideal Warden knows every boy and girl, young man and maiden, old gaffer and ancient dame, in the village. He is the treasurer of the shoe and clothing clubs, and a valued teacher in the schools. It is he who undertakes the management of the summer picnics and outings, and who is foremost in all the winter entertainments which so help to relieve the tedium and monotony of the long nights. It is in his field that the cricket and football teams hold high revel, and the boys and girls are taught to run and jump. Indeed, there is little in the Parish, whether it be connected with spiritual need or bodily recreation, in which he does not share. As for Church finance, the people have been taught to give what they can ; and his own subscriptions represent the tenth part of his income.

What, then, is left for the Parson to do ?

He does not, of course, stand outside any of these duties, he takes his fair share of all ; but then the burden does not fall *entirely* upon him. He has leisure to devote himself to the visiting of the sick and whole ; to train himself by a systematic course of reading and meditation in the science of Theology ; to prepare the weekly sermons with a due regard to

his people's needs, and to scheme new plans of spiritual development in order that the souls in his charge may be led from point to point of the Faith. Few people understand how much a clergyman requires the constant bracing-up of his own soul's energies; he is so occupied in dealing with the needs of others that he is apt to forget his own. Fewer still remember that he can never join in the Service which he is conducting, because he is obliged to bear in mind all the many necessary details, so that there may be nothing to break or distract the worship of his people.

All the more, therefore, does he require the quiet calm of his private study if he is ever to realize the ideal of his own office. For the last fifty years, or so, the clergy have gained a high name for outward activity; far better would it have been, I think, if they had gained a corresponding name for inward holiness.

How all this is to be successfully carried out, side by side with the multitudinous details of lay work so unfairly required of the Parish Priest now-a-days, I know not. But of this I am well assured; that, unless he is careful to make due provision for his own spiritual interests, the lack of it will re-act upon the spiritual interests of his people. That thought alone ought to be sufficient to stir up every true Churchman to save his clergyman from too

much contact with worldly matters. The Apostles themselves protested against any interference of strictly business matters with the claims of their Mission; "It is not reason," they said, "that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables."

But I can hear my reader saying—"This is all very well; but it is not given to every man to possess a gabled house, or terraced gardens, or the where-withal to keep them going; much less to build a Chancel every now and then, or even to pass his days in fairyland."

My candid friend, I admit it. But do me the justice to remember that this is the sketch of an Ideal. The higher we aim, the more we attain; can we not make a beginning in our own small way, and so work upwards? Let our Wardens but love their Church, and all things of which it forms the centre, and plenty of opportunities will be found for proving the depth of their affection. It is as true here, as in other cases we wot of, that "love will find out the way." The widow's mite, in a certain instance, outweighed the rich man's gold. There is also the legend of Euphrasia the Pauper and Justinian the Emperor, which I will tell you if you like. It is not the gift itself, but the acceptance of the gift, which makes it worth the offering; besides, what true-hearted man ever lives for self alone?

And now I am fain to confess that all this time I

have a secret to reveal, and I know not how to manage it. Modesty counsels silence; candour whispers, "Tell it." My Ideal Warden is not to be met with in many places, and the cut of his clothes would hardly suggest that he holds such an Office. He is very well known to me, albeit he is none of mine—I would he were; but then, there is the tenth Commandment. Some few years ago he was more directly associated with the work of the Ministry than he is now; but you remember the Horatian advice?—

*"Solve senescentem mature sanus equum, ne
Peccet ad extremum ridendus . . ."*

Well, that is what he said to his Bishop, and his Bishop solved him, and now he holds the degree of *Pastor Emeritus*.

Shall I go on? Very well. Then, brethren all—Churchwarden or Parson, High or Low, gentle or simple, rich or poor—my Ideal Warden is no layman; not at all. He is only a retired Parson who is devoting the rest of his life to the interests of the Church he loves so well. There! my secret—such as it is—is out; I have said my say; let us ring down the curtain and put the puppets to bed.

One word more—did anyone ever know a Parson without his "one word more?" Let me close with the assurance that I have drawn upon my fancy for

no single scene, or character, or circumstance that has not come under my own personal experience. It is rash of me to say so; for if ever my unworthy-name comes to be known I shall of a surety be lynched, or—better still, perhaps, be sent to Coventry. But if ever I notice, at our Services, the absence of any individual who appears in these pages, I shall know that it is time to hie me—like a guilty thing—into desert places, and there watch in terror until the hunt is up, and the pack in full cry, to the gladsome yells of “gone away!”

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